

BY THE WAY

Cannon, a Hard Act to Follow

BY BILL HENRY

A tall Texan named George Herman Mahon seems to be proving that even a 30-year stint in the Congress can leave a person somewhat in the shadow if, as is the case with Mahon, he's been working with one of the congressional giants. The man Mahon succeeds is dour, cantankerous Clarence Cannon of Missouri, who died a couple of weeks ago. Cannon's dominating personality was such that although he headed a House Appropriations Committee of half-a-hundred members, almost nobody was ever heard of except the 85-year-old chairman. Mahon actually is a strong personality in his own right and, as chairman of the Appropriations subcommittee for defense, had a great deal to say about the fate of approximately half of the national budget. He has plenty of courage, too. When the wolves got after Secretary Robert S. McNamara recently on the TFX airplane contract, Mahon put up a stalwart defense. The Texan from Lubbock looks very much the standard picture of the tall chaps from down yonder. He stands 6 ft., 3 in., and looks considerably younger than his 63 years. As a matter of fact, it is a tribute to the fiery personality of the late Congressman Cannon that he was able to overshadow the likes of Mahon. Cannon was smallish but intense. Aside from his personality, he was considered the top procedural expert in the House and not only wrote the rule book but for four decades was parliamentarian of every Democratic national convention. His dour countenance often dominated the TV picture of the platform at conventions.

Should Get Along With L.B.J.

Mahon is much more the strong, silent type. He is often compared to his fellow-Texan, President Johnson. They're about the same size, both came up from farm life, both taught school for a while. Mahon is a little older, a smidgeon taller. Those who have to worry about relations between the White House and the Appropriations Committee are inclined to believe that the similarity extends to their thinking. It is generally felt that there'll be less friction between Johnson and Mahon than between everybody else and Cannon, who was absolutely impartial — he fought with just about everybody in the White House. Mahon is supposed to have been friendly with Johnson when both were comparative newcomers in the House of Representatives back in the depression days. Because of these facts, and the feeling that anybody would be easier to get along with than Clarence Cannon, administration experts are anticipating smoother sailing for White House policies in the future.

An Expert on Defense Matters

Political experts on the Hill, as distinguished from those at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, expect Mahon to become almost the most important single individual in the House. Not only will he be Appropriations chairman, and retain his leadership of the subcommittee on defense, but with the retirement this year of "Admiral" Carl Vinson, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Mahon will be regarded as top man in defense matters. Mahon is likely to go along with the McNamara business-office theory of greater concentration of authority over the three armed services, perhaps even to the point of unification. Vinson was strongly opposed to McNamara's attempts to eliminate some of the overlapping activities of the various separate departments.